

# Poor Lenin - Bob Darke

Extracts from the 1952 book "The communist technique in Britain" by a former leading member of the Communist Party exposing their authoritarian, power-seeking methods.

## Introduction

This pamphlet is extracts from the book 'The Communist Technique in Britain', published in 1952. Bob Darke, the author was a leading member of the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) for 18 years. He joined because he hated capitalism. Capitalism is an economic system which ignores the needs of the vast majority of the population. All production is for profit. In other words, while the resources of the world could be organised to provide plenty for all, they actually provide great wealth for a few and subsistence or famine for most. In this pamphlet Bob Darke explains how the Communist Party managed to exert an influence vastly out of proportion to its numerical strength. He describes how Party members gained positions of power within Trade Unions. Once there, the Party members first allegiance was always to the Party. His second was to his workmates, and then only when it coincided with the first. The historical significance of this work is obvious in the days of the collapse of Soviet Communism and the Western European Communist Parties. New revelations are being discovered with the opening of the Kremlin secret files.

But this pamphlet is more important than its purely historical interest. Bob Darke describes a Party that will be familiar to most anti-Poll Tax campaigners, and many trade unionists, in the shape of the Militant Tendency and the Socialist Workers' Party. The truth is that most left wing parties today owe some of their 'techniques' to the model put into practice by the CPGB, and originally drawn up by Lenin in his 'April Theses'. This 'Leninism' allows self-proclaimed 'revolutionaries' to deceive their fellow workers without questioning their own morality. They believe that they have become the ideological leadership of the working class. They are convinced that without them, we could never attain the will, or the means to change the world.

It is a reflection of the situation that Bob Darke was faced with that he does not distinguish between Communist Party members and other revolutionary communists. There have always been communists, anarchists and socialists who have rejected the Leninist or 'Trotskyist' models. Readers should bear in mind that the term communist means more than membership of a Communist Party. This pamphlet is not an attack on the idea of working class revolution or communism. The CPGB and today's Marxist-Leninists and Trotskyists represent only a distasteful part of 'left' politics. There are other revolutionaries who seek to destroy capitalism, as part of the working class and introduce a world of real social justice, without privilege or want. The choice before us is 'socialism or barbarism'. The working class is still the only class with the power and the will to topple capitalism. It is necessary to have a class conscious working class revolutionary movement. Bob Darke's book shows that the CPGB, far from wanting to create a new world of social justice simply wanted to create a new centralised dictatorship with itself at the head. Revolutionaries are at war with the capitalist system and the ruling class. It is a class war. The CPGB turned this around and considered the working class its enemy, to be beaten into shape. This is the mistake the Leninists make. They want to be the new ruling class. There have been, and will continue to be, some brilliant revolutionaries who have joined Leninist or Trotskyist, or Maoist parties. But as soon as they start to follow the Party line without question, knowingly misleading their fellow workers, they become part of the problem rather than the solution. The revolution will depend on the working class breaking free of unquestioning discipline and obedience to authority. It will

rely on the working class approaching problems by trying to understand them rather than blindly following a 'Party line'. We don't need an intellectual, or otherwise, elite to give us orders. We have to act with solidarity and mutual respect, not the contempt that the CPGB and its descendants treat us with.

## POOR LENIN

"I joined the Party because I could no longer tolerate a system which I believed to be bad. Party propaganda had told me that the system was doomed anyway and my efforts would hasten its end. I wanted to work for the improvement of society, for freedom, justice, progress, and the full expression of Man's talent and ability. I still want to work for these things, but I know that I cannot do so inside the Party, that Communism will not bring them. Given that, then, if many Communists join the Party with such praiseworthy motives what happens to turn them into what they become? You must accept an analogy to understand the answer here. The Communist Party is at war with the rest of society. Marxism declares there is no compromise in this war, no peace between one side and the other.

The Communist is taught that his enemy (that is anybody but a Communist) is ruthless, merciless, and unprincipled. To defeat him the Communist is justified in being more ruthless, more merciless and more unprincipled. He is told that the existing society will double-cross and outsmart him and his fellow Communists if it is given the chance. You can test this for yourself. Question any Communist on the ethics of his behaviour and he will cite cases where, in his opinion, the present system has been just as unethical. He is at war and a war cannot be won if you permit yourself the indulgence of seeing your enemy's point of view. He has an end in view, the establishment of a Communist society. That, to him, is a good end and anything that hastens it, however bad in itself, is a good thing.

Take a Communist on the lack of democracy in a trade union controlled by a Party minority and he will not attempt to explain that the minority is in fact a majority, he will say that the minority are working for the general good, therefore its actions are justifiable. Has the Communist no conscience then? He has a conscience, but he places it in pawn to the Party when he joins. The Party takes care of his moral scruples by promising him that by his efforts he will bring the revolution and universal peace.

Harry Pollitt it was, I think, who said 'Every Communist in a capitalist society is a capitalist at heart.' This wasn't a matter of benevolent tolerance, it was a warning to all comrades to beware of the capitalist fifth column within themselves. When a Communist is disturbed by the voice of his conscience he remembers the words of Pollitt and drowns it.

Why is the Communist so intolerant?

Once again the war analogy. If you wish to defeat the enemy you do not tolerate him, you hate him. The Communist is taught and readily believes (because he wants to believe) that there is no middle line. Marxism preaches the inevitability of revolutionary change within society. Anyone who denies this is acting against it and thus hindering the coming to power of the Communists. His extermination as a political force is a number one priority.

A middle line would lessen the pace of change and therefore is in itself reactionary, except in the case of the Popular Front against Fascism when the Party believed that the situation demanded a measure of co-operation with non-Communists (only with the belief that the non-Communists were being given enough rope to make a halter for themselves). The Communist does not respect a free society for tolerating his existence, he despises it. He believes it tolerates him only because it is afraid of him.

Does the Party never do good then?

Yes it does. But the good it does is relative. The Communists is prepared to do good only in so far as that good strengthens the Party, intensifies the struggle between different classes,

brings the moment of revolutionary change the nearer. The coming to power of the working-class is a good thing. If the moment of revolutionary change is hastened by acts that are illegal, unjust and inhuman, the end, to him makes them right.

A man may be driven into the Party by the social injustice meted out to his parents in the form of poverty, privation, industrial accidents. He joins the Party to build a society where such things are impossible. But once in the Party he is not expected to place his emotions before his loyalty to the Party.

I have known of Communists who joined the Party because they could no longer stomach the sight of their parents working long hours for small pay, and then see them turn on those same parents, deride them for being dupes of a capitalist system, for being 'lumpenproletariat'.

Why is it impossible to argue with a Communist?

He will only argue on his own terms. He is right. You are wrong. You are wrong because you have not accepted his belief that the Marxist interpretation of life is the only one. If you have not accepted it you are on the other side. You cannot be speaking the truth. I have had a vivid experience of this lately. A woman in Coventry asked me to talk to her son whose Communist Party membership troubled her. I talked to the lad and to his friend, a Party official. My experience of the Party was wider and longer than theirs.

Yet whatever chapter, whatever gospel I quoted I could not convince them. They blandly refused to believe me. Why? I had deserted the Party. I had gone over to the other side. I was now on the side of 'capitalism' and they suspected my motives. So long as I remained in the Party they would have listened to me and believed me. Once I was outside the Party they would not believe a word I said..."

"The British Communist Party is controlled, rigidly and unquestioningly, from its glass-walled headquarters near Covent Garden. It may not admit this, not openly, for that would suggest that all the rank-and-file had to do so was to keep in step. But it is a fact, just the same, although there is a perverse form of democracy on paper.

Consider the Hackney Borough Secretariat, for example.

This is led at the moment by the Secretary, Comrade John Betteridge, an able, agile, and resolute man who models himself diligently on Comrade Melenkov of the Soviet Politburo. Comrade Betteridge's parish may be a little smaller than the Russian comrade's, but he has the same authority within its limits. The members of his Secretariat are carefully chosen so that all activity in the borough, industrial, social, professional, and racial, is represented on it. At any given moment someone on the Secretariat could give a detailed picture of the day-to-day problems in any one of those spheres - with the Communist solution to them, of course. The democratic nature of the branch is written in the scriptures. Theoretically all members of the Secretariat are elected by the body of the branch once a year at an aggregate meeting. They are subject, once more theoretically, to a majority vote, to the approval of the rank and file, and must be re-elected or rejected annually. You can not quarrel with that, can you? Then how does it work in practice? Each year the existing Secretariat draws up its own panel of names for the new Secretariat. It does this after it has consulted with the London District Committee (which is the co-ordinating authority of all branches in the London area). The Secretariat is often so satisfied with its work during the past year that it suggests that it should be elected en bloc. Of course, the London District may not agree, in which case changes will be made in the list. The panel is then placed before the aggregate meeting and comrades are invited to vote on it. They have absolute freedom of choice. They may vote Yes or No. Of course No would be a wasted vote, for there is no alternative to the panel.

They are entitled to reject the suggested panel out of hand and suggest an entirely new one. I say that they are at liberty to do this - but I have never known of it being done. It would indicate a lack of faith in the wisdom of the branch and district leadership. It would smack of 'fractionizing', a heresy punishable by expulsion. A panel of names set up in opposition to the

resigning Secretariat's suggestions would have no more hope than Sir Waldron Smithers would have of sitting in the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet Basically then, the resigning Secretariat is re-elected every year.

Don't think the rank and file ever regard this method as undemocratic (they have a vote, don't they?) - or if they do, they never say so. The Communist, taught to regard himself as the leader of the working class, is also taught to be an uncritical follower of his own leaders.

Among the ordinary members of the Party there is a fanatical worship' of leading Communists, British and Russian. It expresses itself in idealised portraits, in tedious biographies published by headquarters, and although the teaching of Marxist philosophy is against the whole procedure the Party makes no effort to correct it. Its tactical value is enormous. The Party must be able to swing abruptly on the pivot of its own leadership, confident that there will be no criticism, no objections from below. when an abrupt reversal of the Party line has meant that all comrades must deny themselves thrice in the market-place I have never heard one of them suggest, openly that perhaps the Executive has been guilty of a mistake.

The leading Communist is never guilty of a mistake. it was some other fellow.

If you are moved to smile at this childishness, remember that it is the Parties greatest strength. Any other party, based on the free will and conscience of its members would break up under such dictatorship. The more submissive the Communist, the more powerful the Communist Party.

And no Communist would admit that the leading non-Communist statesmen of the world are wiser, more intelligent, more astute than his Borough Secretary - or himself for that matter. He knows all the answers...

"A Communist branch is expected to support itself financially. The money goes upward in the Communist Party not downward. If gold does come from Moscow, I never heard of any that reached Hackney. Payment for branch officials must be found by members, nobody is more enthusiastic in seeing that it is collected than the officials themselves.

The weekly membership subscription is fourpence, and since a large proportion of this is passed up the line to the District Committee it is obvious that a branch cannot support itself by subscriptions alone. The money must come from somewhere else. Thus it is that the Communist has a red flag in one hand and a collecting box in the other The Party frowns on membership levies which it regards as 'social democratic measures' (and if there's anything worse than a Tory it's a Social-Democrat). It maintains that Communist funds must come from the pockets of non-Communists. In this way the Party prevents itself from being drained to death and compels its members to keep in contact with the non-Communist working class. If you want a workmate at the bench to donate sixpence to this or that fighting fund you've got to keep talking to him. And if he only parts with with the sixpence to stop you talking then half of the battle has been won at any rate.

Anyone who gives money to a Communist-sponsored fund is from thereon ear-marked as a 'possible'. A record of his name is kept. He will be asked again for money, and if he gives it he will be recorded as a 'sympathiser'. Such are the first cautious steps towards recruiting new members.

Regularly every Friday, at the gates of factories, in canteens, workshops, at dockyard gates, in council flats and transport depots in Hackney, the good comrade may be seen rattling a box or waving raffle tickets and calling:

'Help the Party, comrades! The Communist Party! The only party that fights for the workers!' There's always some Party cause to be in need of money. The Daily Worker Fighting Fund. The Peace Campaign. The latest martyr's defence fund. The Rent Committee's Defence Fund. The Anglo-Iron-Curtain Society's Fund. The International Brigade... the Strike Committee... the Spanish Prisoners. Always a fund.

Always a fund because the branch is always in desperate need of money.

All branch members are sub-divided into groups according to their professions and trades, or according to their particular strength and peculiar duties. Each of these groups is given to a fixed sum which must be collected from non-Communists within that particular grouping.

The sum may change as time goes on, but it never changes downward.

Communist busmen, for example, were expected to collect £5 a month from Dalston busmen. I have had to collect that myself, and, like other comrades, no doubt, I had to get money more from force of personality than from argument. The Secretariat accepted no excuses for returns less than the amount stipulated (indeed they brought disciplinary action if it happened too often), and they rarely praised returns in excess of the amount. To my knowledge no one ever suggested that non-Communist busmen were reluctant to donate £5 a month to the Party. Comrade busmen brought the money in, and sometimes only their wives knew where it really came from.

In all my years with the Party I can never remember a time when there was not this hysterical demand for money. Church repair funds and flag-day organisers could learn much from the Party. Every month the Hackney Branch had to send a contribution of £20 to the London District Committee, and London District Committee never accepted excuses in lieu. Of course this business of making the money up out of your own pocket was never officially recognised. You weren't supposed to give your own money, you were supposed to give someone else's. The only Party members who were allowed, indeed expected, to give their own money were the professional members, doctors, lawyers, who were largely under cover. The Party drained them of contributions.

'Come on, Comrade, you do nothing else for the Party. We are expecting ten pounds from you this month.' I know of a couple of comrades who gave up the Party after a careful review of their bank accounts.

The Hackney Borough Secretariat meets once a week, not at Branch Headquarters, for there is none. The Party owns no property in the borough and has no fixed meeting place. It meets at this or that comrade's house. Thus does it save money and thus does it tie each comrade's private life more closely to the Party wheel. No Communist can indulge his fancy for bourgeois tastes when they are likely to come under the scrutiny of his Party associates. I have known Party members to sit in their own living-rooms without protest while other members of the Secretariat ridiculed and censured their choice of furniture, curtains, honks, newspapers, even toys for their children.

Once a month there is an aggregate meeting of the full branch at which times a local hall is hired, and there is a careful examination of Party cards at the door. Group meetings are held once or twice a week, even daily if there is a fight on. Communist fraction meetings within unions (I shall deal more thoroughly with union activity later) meet as often as affairs warrant.

Secretariat meetings are conducted briskly and efficiently. The wife of the comrade in whose home the meeting takes place may take part if she is a Party member if not her place is in the kitchen making tea.

The Secretary calls the meeting to order and the members sitting comfortably on the floor (for who in Hackney has fourteen chairs in his living-room?), quickly get down to business. First of all the representatives of each grouping report on their activities. A docker, for example, may give a thorough outline of the current situation at the docks. He may explain why it is possible or impossible to organise a two-hour political strike there against the Korean War. Or he may concern himself solely to an analysis of the internecine war within his union. He must also report on the number of Daily Workers sold among dockers, the number of new Communist Party members made, the number of 'sympathetic' contacts who can be milked of money for the fighting funds or eventually recruited into the Party. A

housewife may report on the success or otherwise (and it had best not be otherwise) of the Peace Petition canvassed in her block of flats. A school teacher has her report to make, largely concerned with the Party activities within parent-teacher organisations. Since she is regarded as an intellectual, she will be astute enough to show proper humility before her proletarian comrades.

Through all these reports runs one consistent thread - the Party Line. If the line is Peace, for example, each group representative must show how his group has been exploiting it. He may call upon representatives of other groups for advice and assistance. He may appeal for a glamour-figure from London District - Ted Bramley, Peter Kerrigan, even Harry Pollitt - to come down and lend support.

The reports must be constructive and illuminating. They are not expected to report failure. Invariably they reflect credit on the Party and the comrade who makes them. This part of the Secretariat's meeting is always long and tedious, but it is conducted with great solemnity. There is no joking, there is no frivolity. Even where Christian names are used they sound cold and inhuman. When all the reports have been made the Borough Secretary rewards them with praise or criticism. He is listened to with respect, for none there believe they are just listening to Comrade John Betteridge. They are listening to a man who has received his instructions from higher up.

The Borough Secretariat is a lever to be lifted or depressed by the London District Comminee, according to the Party Line, which is itself evolved by the National Executive of the Party. Within all other political parties it is possible for members of the rank and file seriously to influence their party's whole policy. That never happens in the Communist Party. London District is a body on which sit representatives of all the borough parties, and what Comrade John Betteridge had to tell us about London District's decisions had all the solemnity and authority of the tablets Moses brought down from the mountain. When the Borough Secretariat hears its instructions from London District there is always a full discussion of them. Do not let such a statement mislead you. The discussion is never critical. There is never any suggestion that the instructions indicate a softening of the brain among the Party's leadership. No. Discussion is concerned solely with how those instructions can be carried out..."

"Sometimes there are embarrassing moments, and the extraordinary efficient if robot-like machinery of Party activity comes to a paralysed halt. This is invariably when the Party Line hiccups.

The halt may last for a few days, but momentum is quickly regained. It is more like marking time than a halt. I often wondered whether the National Executive of the Party was ever aware of the strain it put on branches when it reversed the Party Line. Perhaps it knew but trusted in the discipline it had forged.

Those few days of uncertainty, however, can mean all or everything to the ordinary Party member. His greatest fear, after all is that he may unwittingly speak against the Line which has yet to be announced. Such fear stifles him into silence. Thus he has a marked willingness to accept the new Line when it comes, if only to put himself out of his agony. Consider, for example, the way the Party's attitude to the Marshall Plan hit us at branch level. There were comrades who made the mistake Czechoslovakia made and welcomed the Plan. There was a time lag between the announcement of the Plan and the Soviet Government's declaration against it. When we in Hackney heard about the Plan we went about for days without mentioning it. Nobody was going to catch us out, least of all London District. If non-Communists quizzed us about it well - we smiled enigmatically.

According to theory a Communist, if he is a good Marxist, should come to the same decision as Stalin, and at the same moment. But I have never known anyone who succeeded in doing thus. So when the Marshall Plan was announced we all waited for Comrade Stalin to make up

our minds, and none of us waited more anxiously than the Daily Worker. We were so relieved when we heard from Moscow, via London District, that we accepted the new line without argument. The Hackney Secretariat that day got down to a discussion on how opposition to the Plan could be organised within the borough. No one got up to say, 'well is it a good idea, this Marshall Plan, or isn't it?'

So far as we were concerned it wasn't.

The campaign we launched was simple. It was based on the assumption that few people in Hackney understood the motive or nature of the Marshall Plan. Therefore all we had to do was to make the simplest interpretation of it and leave them to make up their own minds. And our interpretation was that the Marshall Plan meant war. If you agreed with the Marshall Plan then you were agreeing to another war, with the atom bomb.

The topsy-turvy business of Tito also went unexplained for days. There was no meeting of the Hackney Secretariat until the issue was clear; at least there was not meeting at which Tito was discussed. His portrait was the only likeness of a Communist leader that hung on the walls of my home, and during the meetings that were held there in those anxious days no comrade dared let his eyes wander to that smiling face. The whole world was discussing Tito. We were keeping our mouths shut.

Had anyone else in the Party thrown down a challenge to Stalin we should have attacked him immediately. But Tito was different. He was a Communist hero. His portrait hung next to Stalin's in most Communists' homes. The shock of his break with the Russians stunned the Party, and not a few of us privately believed that it was the beginning of a great schism. But neither I nor anyone else was allowed time for such heresies to develop. I must admire the Party Executive for the smart way they handled a delicate situation. The Daily Worker did not, of course, present an objective picture of the struggle between Tito and the Cominform. It began a systematic and sustained barrage of anti-Tito abuse and propaganda. We accepted it readily. We had been living on our nerves for so long that we were in the mood to accept anything.

Only when every Party branch was formulating plans for 'fighting Titoism' did the District committee start explaining the Cominform's case (Tito's case we could get from the capitalist press). Probably most of us never read it. I don't suppose many Communists today could tell you what the case is, but they could most certainly tell you the names Tito should be called. Yet the Tito split was perhaps the most critical phase the Party passed through. If anything had been likely to split the British and other Communist parties it was the Tito affair.

But you wouldn't have thought it from the attitude of our leaders. I remember one speaker who came down from headquarters to talk to us about Titoism. He was calm, self-assured, like a school teacher patiently lecturing a dull class. As far as I can remember the gist of what he said, our Party's leaders had known all the time of Tito's possible defection. Nothing had been said about it publicly because it had been hoped that he would be persuaded to see the light.

But what could you expect from a man who had been an American agent during the war? There it was, flung at us casually like that. Tito was an American agent. During those wartime moments when we had all but made a saint out of Tito he had been taking money from the Americans. He had betrayed us, let us down. We hated him. From then on we were all in step with Uncle Joe again.

And the portraits of Tito were taken down from the walls and quietly burned. Harry Pollitt had once talked proudly of the signed photograph of Marshal Tito which hung on his wall. I wonder what he did with it.

The Hackney Party's discussion of the new anti-Tito line was, I suppose a comic business, had I been in the mood to appreciate its humour. We were all anxious to talk about the new line, the new villain who out-Trotskyed Trotsky, the new jackal of capitalism. We were all far

too busy to look over our shoulders to see if our consciences were showing... "When I started active work for the Party I began to enlist working men like myself, paint workers at first, for I was then working for Lewis Bergers. Factory groups of Communists came into being, then cell fractions inside the unions. The Party Congress decided that 'Every factory must be a Communist fortress' and we worked day and night in Hackney to fulfil the order We blossomed into a broad red flower in the garden of the East End..." "By the time the war broke out we had our fingers in everything. We were a party of working-men and we were a dangerous party, aggressives, militant trade unionists, tried, tough, ruthless..." "Today every Hackney Communist knows his duty. When the Party finds a valuable worker, such as it considered me, it is the policy to work the man to his death, literally sometimes, to pile obligations on him and abuse him if he weakens. what are the duties of a Communist? To start with he must be a member of a trade union and he must be active in that union. He must be an active member of the Communist cell within that union. If he can join a club and form part of a Communist cell within that, then he is under an obligation to do so.

He must:

Pay his fourpence a week subscription. Support the Daily Worker Fighting Fund. Collect money for the Daily Worker Fighting Fund. Sell the Daily Worker Buy as much Party literature as possible. Sell as much Party literature as possible. Attend every branch meeting of his union. Attend every Communist cell meeting within his union. Turn out for every demonstration in his area. Turn out for every District demonstration. Join an Anglo-Iron-Curtain Friendship Society Join another Anglo-Iron-Curtain Friendship Society. Get his wife to join the Party. Get his father to join. Get his children to join the Young Communist League. Do as he's told. Hate America. Love Russia. Every year a Party member must fill in a form and return it to Central Office. It must give a full report of his activities during the past year. On the basis of these returns the Party is able to assess the strength of its membership and its vitality. That form haunts the average comrade from the end of one year to another. Where the Party has a member who manages to fulfil all the above obligations and still have time to blow his nose, the Party will pile more work on him until he becomes too ill to carry more. That is not an overstatement. It is not a coincidence that so many Communists sicken with tuberculosis. The names of the comrades whom the Party worked to death make a tragic list. Among them is Bill Rust, editor of the Daily Worker. when the Party claims, as it always does on the anniversary of his death, that he died for Communism, they are not indulging in polite courtesies. It is ironic that the anniversary of Bill Rust's death should be used by the Party as an excuse for goading on the eager-beavers within the ranks. Everybody is urged to collect more money, sell more Daily Workers in memory of Bill Rust.

The Party never gives its members a moment for reflective thought Every Sunday morning the Literature Secretary's staff tour the borough, pushing a quota of literature through the comrades' letter-boxes. They are expected to read it and sell it. I doubt, from my own personal experience, whether much of it is really sold. I've burnt quires of it on my little fire but I've turned in the money to the Literature Secretary just the same, and I'd hate to say what Ann felt about that. There was little enough money in our house at the best of times..." "The obligations of the professional comrade are specialised. The lawyer must place his knowledge and services freely at the service of the Party whenever it comes into conflict with the law. The printer must use his ink, paper and machinery to turn out local literature. The doctor and nurse must find a moment when a pleasant talk about the Communist approach to nationalised medicine and all the world's ills will take a patient's mind off his own trivial sickness. The housewife must organise her neighbours into little afternoon teas. By accident a friend might drop in and by accident the friend would be a well-known Communist like Bob Darke, and he would be only too happy to answer any questions the good ladies might have on the question of rents, and housing, and why their sons have been conscripted to Korea..."



"The Hackney Communist party, in common with other branches, has one supreme obligation. It is to sell the Daily Worker wherever and whenever possible. Each comrade is geared to this massive circulation drive and the harder he works the harder he has to work. The Literature Secretary of the Hackney Branch sat on the local Trades Council at one time, which was not merely an accident. Literature is held to be the Party's strongest ammunition, and the wider it can be spread the better I doubt if there is a political party in the world which spends as much time and money per head of the membership on the production and distribution of literature. The presence of the branch's Literature Secretary on the Trades Council guaranteed a bountiful flow of Daily Workers, Labour Monthlies, Challenges, and all the plethora of party publications, toward that section of life where it was believed they would do most good - the trade unionist. The selling of the Daily Worker is organised like a military campaign, with a tactical appreciation of the strategical situation. On Saturday afternoons and evenings the branch membership turns out en masse to sell the special edition of the Worker - in Ridley Road, in the Jewish quarter, in markets, outside cinemas and dance-halls. Hackney Communists sell about 20,000 extra copies of the Daily Worker every Saturday. Some Communists work themselves into nervous breakdowns over this business of selling the Worker. The Dalston bus garage has a Worker-seller outside the doors every Friday morning when union subscriptions are paid. Where Party members have reported that a block of flats is sympathetic to the Party then it is invaded almost daily by comrades who knock at every door and flourish a copy of the paper under every nose. If Pollitt or Palme Dutt, or Burns, or any well known Party member is to write a special article for the Worker; Borough Secretaries are alerted three or four days before hand..." "On the day of publication of the special article no Party member is excused from the operation. A housewife, for example, is told to get up at five in the morning to take a quire of Workers to the gates of this factory or that, and sell them before she goes home to see her children off to school. Examples of such self sacrifice on the part of the woman were always used to goad on other comrades. The fact that the woman concerned might become a nervous 'wreck, or lose her husband, or ruin her family life, is regarded as irrelevant. Did not Russian women go into the front line with troops during the war, comrade?"

In addition to the torrent of literature that flooded down to us from the District we had our own output in Hackney which a comrade printer turned off the machine for us. We selected factories for special types of propaganda. If there was a local strike on we make a point of rushing out a special pamphlet on it. We studied the habits of workers in different factories, where they ate, whether they sat outside the gates at dinnertime, what their routes homeward were. We waylaid them with literature, with loudspeaker vans, we harried them, we pursued them, we captured them. We worked, still they work tirelessly. There is no special Party police, nobody detailed to watch you and see that you exert the last ounce of energy. Not one comrade really trusts another, however. And weaknesses will be exposed by denunciation. We worked in every section of Hackney life that mattered to the wide political baffle, and that means every section there was - even creches. We worked, and I repeat the Party still works, in unions, schools, hospitals, factories, garages, flats, clubs, dance-halls, canteens. We had the run of the kerbstones and the playgrounds. We had our finger on the carotid artery of the borough..." "...The best example I can quote, since I was personally concerned, is the case of the Hackney Cycle Speedway Club. This was formed after the war and had a membership of some sixty boys and girls in their teens. At the time the Party became interested in it, it was a happy, non-political group without a Communist in it, except perhaps a couple of Young Communist Leaguers who, I suspect, joined it as a relaxation. One of these Young Communist Leaguers innocently asked me, as a Borough Councillor, to help the club get a cycle track, a bomb-site which they wished to convert into a cinder-way. The club had three teams and wanted to know whether the LCC would grant them the use of a bomb-site. I put

the situation to the Borough Secretariat and got their approval. To support me I had the local unions swing into line, pass resolutions, make representations. We built up quite a pressure on the subject and eventually the boys and girls got their cycle track.

At the big meeting held to celebrate the success of the campaign and the opening of the track the Party sent the YCL into action. Many of them had been told to join anyway, while the agitation was going on. Party literature was on sale during the meeting; copies of Challenge, the YCL paper, contained a special article by me. It was called 'Fighting for youth facilities while money is being spent on war. More and more young Communists joined the club and the sellers of Challenge made a straight target of it. Having secured the club's goodwill by leading the fight for its cinder-track the Party decided that the YCL should recruit every member of the club into the Party and get every one of them to sign the Peace Petition.

I had already talked to the club about it and about the uselessness of National Service, but when the Party wanted me to keep up my contacts with the club and swing it even closer into the orbit of Party activity, something made me jib. Finally I stayed away from the club altogether and flatly refused the Party's instructions to get every one of those boys to sign the Peace Petition. I entered the great rent fight more enthusiastically.

As a borough councillor I knew when council rents were to be increased long before the public were warned, and I reported this fact to the Party Secretariat. An immediate meeting was called and the matter was discussed long into the night. The meeting was often held in my home, and all the while Ann waited in our tiny kitchen. When the Party decided to fight the rent increases it did so because it realised that by securing public support we would raise the prestige of the Party within the borough. The question of fighting the rent increases because they were an unnecessary burden did not enter into it. We had one question to answer only: Would the Party benefit by opposing them? All the Party machinery came into action when we had made our decision. Propaganda leaflets for distribution among the affected tenants, petitions to the council, public demonstrations. The struggle began innocently enough, without any Party tag. Under standing orders of the council I am able to make statements to the local press. I made one, damning the proposed rent increases, advising all tenants to express their dissatisfaction and formulate plans to defeat the measure.

Prior to this I had already moved the reference back of the council's plans to raise rents. Everyone in the borough knew that Bob Darke was against rent increases and prepared to fight. When the council refused to see a tenants' deputation (inspired by Communists living in the affected blocks) it gave Councillor Morris Blaston, the other Communist on the council, the chance to declare that the tenants were not being treated fairly. His spirited objections were fully reported in the Press. The Press also reported that there was to be a mass meeting of tenants, and that 'indignant tenants who were threatening to march into the Town Hall had to be restrained by Councillor Darke'. There was no doubt in the minds of anybody in Hackney now that the Communist Party was the only party prepared to fight the rent increases.

Although the mass meeting had been advertised as 'non-political' the Party saw to it that no opportunity was missed. Communist stewards were in control of the crowds. Party literature was on sale on a table at the back of the hall, and with it was a little pile of membership forms. The Daily Worker carried a special news coverage of the coming fight. The hall was crowded, as you would expect it to be, with people who found it hard enough to pay the rents they did without paying more. There were speeches, contributions from the body of the hall, but from the Party's point of view they meant nothing. I was among the speakers who advised the immediate forming of a Tenants' Committee. The Party likes these committees. So long as they exist, however dormant, they are a medium for propaganda and Party Line activity..." "Now we, as Communists, did not want any sort of a committee. We wanted one that was securely under our thumb. To get it was easy enough. The average Englishman, no matter

how badly he feels about a matter, is reluctant to accept office to fight against it; he will vote for the man who seems most willing. Party members strategically placed about the hail proposed and seconded Party nominees. We elected a malleable non-party chairman and secretary, and I was elected president.

Eight blocks of flats were involved in the rent increase, and the committee we elected consisted of two tenants from each block. Only a minority of them were Communists, but that was all we needed. The others knew nothing about committee work and were prepared to lean heavily on us who did..." "I advised an immediate committee meeting, which brought up problem number one. There was no money. Where should it meet? My home was available. Why not meet there? So there we met. And if a local Communist or two happened to be there on the same evening, why that was a coincidence; their advice was gratefully received.

It was my job to separate the sheep from the goats in this committee. Out of the sixteen, I remember I concentrated all the Party's propaganda on five. We did not stop the rent increases but we strengthened the Party's influence and prestige and we secured an open door into eight blocks of council flats. For weeks after that fight we flooded those blocks with literature, with Peace Petition forms, with membership forms for the Party..."

Affairs like this rent strike are what the Party means when it talks of the 'day-to-day struggle'. To an innocent that might mean the day-to-day struggle of the working class against capitalism, toward a better life. To the Party it means the daily struggle of the Communist for the extension of Communist influence. We were all in it. Everyone who came to me for help while I was a councillor was, as far as the Party was concerned, a potential reader of the Daily Worker; a potential member of the Party. Communist nurses at the hospital were under obligation to let The patients know of the Party's plan for the consumptive. Old age pensioners' pennies were welcome when given in gratitude for our untiring struggle to raise their pensions. No man was too old to join the Party, and the older he was the better it would look when the Daily Worker announced: 'Veteran Pensioner joins Communist Party - "Never too old to fight," he says.' And what satisfaction does the Party member get out of it? He tells himself, as I told myself many times, that he is bringing the Revolution nearer if he gets tired, exhausted, then he consoles himself with the thought that there are casualties in all wars. If his spirit dries up within him and he is wise, he tells no one.

Sometimes the carrot is dangled before his nose. The 'Red Star of Lenin', for example, was evolved as a reward for any Communist who could recruit ten new members in three months. When that worthless award was introduced all areas of Britain were given targets. London's whole target was 5,000, and of that Hackney was expected to find 200. The 'Red Star of Lenin'. You may find it silly, but comrades went mad in their drive to earn it. To become a hero. To have their pictures in the Daily Worker. The 'Red Star of Lenin'. Poor Lenin.

Every Communist is under an obligation to belong to a Trade Union. This firm rule is not without some philosophical foundation. Marxist theory maintains that the beginning of class consciousness in the worker occurs at that moment when he begins to struggle against his employer. If a Communist is around when the struggle starts, all the better.

The Party views the trade union branch as a political weapon, the most important one in the armoury if absolute control of it can be secured. Among them this attitude of mind is quite shameless..."

There were factories where Communist influence and control of the trade union machinery was strong. The British worker is in the main a good trade unionist and he is loyal to his union and trusts it. Nobody knows this loyalty better than the Communists, and nobody is more cynical about abusing it..."

It is not necessary for the Party to have a majority membership of the unions. It is necessary to have a hard core who never miss a union meeting. It is necessary to have at least three of

the key positions on union executives held by open or under-cover Communists. Wherever Communists go all out to swing a union of a union branch into their power they aim at placing Party members into the posts of Secretary, Chairman and Treasurer. Particularly the Treasurer, for we must remember that the Party wants money, always it wants money. With a Party Treasurer in control of union funds he can be expected to agree to union grants to any Party Line organisation that asks for them. When Communists in the union jockey through snap resolutions long after union business should be finished, appealing for financial support to this or that lion-Curtain Friendship Society, then the Party-member Treasurer can always be relied upon to support the donation..." "And the Daily Worker will give great prominence to such grants, pointing out that they have been made in the name of so many hundred trade unionists (who weren't within two miles of the meeting when the grants were made).

Communist unionists always attend meetings, and because they are always in attendance the donkey-work of union business is willingly handed over to them. They are familiar with union business, union politics and union trickery in a way a casual unionist never is. Nobody knows a point of order better than a Communist, and heaven knows how many anti-Communists have foundered on a point of order adroitly produced by a Communist. Branch membership of meetings may be large, but attendance at branch meetings is invariably small. This lack of interest on the part of the average unionist is the Communists big opportunity. He will pack a thinly attended meeting with his own comrades and sympathisers, he will ease Party members into the chair, on to the committee. He works like a mole and no non-Communist can keep up with him..."

"I have listened to good Socialist trade unionists... swear that they will always support the Communists in union matters because they always fight for the workers'. Try telling such good-hearted men that the Party is only amused by their naivety. The Party sees the trade union branch purely and simply as a means of furthering the Party Line, as a means of waging the international political struggle on an industrial terrain..."

To work for these things the Communist will even break union rules. In my own time on the Hackney Trades Council I have eased through Communist-inspired resolutions on peace, on Korea, on Russia, long after the fixed time for union business to end. I have eased through those resolutions knowing that the men who might have opposed them and defeated them have looked at the clock and gone home.

And while I have stood there in the meeting hall proposing the motions I have known that a runner was waiting outside, ready to take the result of the vote to the Daily Worker; where a hole in the paper was waiting to be filled with: 'Twenty thousand Hackney workers oppose Marshall Aid!'...

"If the News Editor of the Worker thinks it worth while he will have a draft story written, set up in type and waiting long before the union meeting is held..."

It is an essential part of Communist policy to capture the District Office. It is the mouth of the funnel. It is the brain and tongue. It speaks for the whole area. And if one Party member in the District Office likes to say publicly that the war in Korea is wrong then you can be sure that the Daily Worker will say that he has spoken for so many thousand ordinary British working-men. Get a Communist into the District Office and within a few months there will be changes in the clerical staff; typists, clerks, even office boys will be replaced by Party members. Get a Communist in control of a union's District Office and the rooms can then be used as a convenient centre for Party faction meetings. Equipment, typewriters, duplicating machines, chairs, tables can be placed at the service of the Party. I know of several union offices in the Hackney area (Party controlled, of course) which lent the whole of their equipment to the Communist candidate in a parliamentary election..."

"Of course, sometimes the Party overdoes it in its anxiety to capture the offices of a union. I

can remember a time when, in the Fire Brigades Union during the war, we had secured the offices of President, General Secretary, and National Officer and Treasurer. Every District Office had a Party member as a secretary, and the clerical staff were heavily laced with Party members. But when the Party headquarters decided to exploit this situation and swing the Fire Brigades Union behind the campaign for a Second Front it met with intense opposition from the rank and file in the stations. Thus you had a situation where the ordinary trade unionist was so much out of sympathy with the officers he had ostensibly elected that he violently repudiated their decisions. High-powered Party conferences were held on this issue. Heads rolled in the Party and we were all told to get down there below and put in some hard work among the rank and file. Having once captured the union branch and District Office, however, communists can go to work in the factories with the confident feeling that they will have official union backing for any Party Line that they like to start. It is never necessary for the Party to have overwhelming numbers in a factory to swing it into line. I know a factory where some 2,000 workers were employed. Of its twelve shop stewards six were Communists and there was a fraction of thirty Party members among the workers. Not many Party members, would you say? But that factory was constantly passing resolutions along the Party Line, constantly getting itself into the Daily Worker for its 'advanced thinking'. The secret, of course, lay with the six shop stewards, the party controlled only one in every sixty of the workers, but it controlled half of the shop stewards. . A Communist shop steward has two duties: first to the Party, and second to his union workmates. He obeys the first, always, and the second only when it coincides with the first..." opportunity. He will pack a thinly attended meeting with his own comrades and sympathisers, "I have known cases where a job by Communist shop stewards. They are men of incredible power... "The Party never attempts to out-vote a non-Communist official who is deeply entrenched in the esteem of the union's rank and file. But go he must if he stands in the way of the Party. And go he generally does. He is worked to death. More and more work is piled on him by his Communist colleagues in the District Office until he collapses under it, or fails so miserably to fulfil his duties that a recommendation for his dismissal seems the kindest measure possible. In the Fire Brigades Union during the war I was part of a conspiracy that removed eight national officers who stood in the way of the Communist march to full control. Most of them we wiped out of the way by breaking down their health with over-work. We ) contributed handsomely to the eulogies that marked their retirement from office. where the rest fought back we turned on a whispering campaign, accusations of immoderate drinking, of gambling and immorality, of a personal or domestic life that reflected 'on his standing as a union officer'. If his personal life was so blameless that not even the most credulous would believe lies about it, then we rumoured that he was in truck with the bosses, that he was a Tory sympathiser. And if that were not successful we whispered that he was a secret Communist. That always worked. The British trade unionist will tolerate an open Communist, but never a secret one..." "...Hackney Communist Party at one time or another controlled twenty-eight out of thirty- five union branches in the borough. Yet at no time has its trade union strength been higher than 150. Those 150 men and women swung Hackney's unionists behind the banner of Lenin and Stalin on more occasions than I like to remember now. what they did and are still doing is miraculous, if the devil can work miracles..." "Communist strategy today is determined by the [Party's National Industrial Policy Committee] NIPC. Since the end of the war the most hackneyed slogan has been 'Lenin said trade unions decide everything.' More accurately it could be said that trade unionists within the Party decide everything. General Secretaries, Presidents, District Officers, and national organisers of some of Britain's most powerful trades unions are members of the NIPC. They attend its meetings and discuss the secrets of their unions with the Executive members of the Party without any bourgeois scruples as to whether such discussions would be approved of by their brother unionists.

Many of them travel from one end of the country to the other to attend meetings. Not one of them to my knowledge pays his travelling expenses out of his own pocket. Not that the Party pays either. As leading trade union officials they are expected to use union funds for such jaunts. What are union funds for but to fight for the workers? And who fights strongest for the workers? The Communist Party. The logic is inescapable..."

"The greatest physical strain is placed on the Party member when the annual conference of his union takes place. The policy and tactics which the Party must follow at this conference are thrashed out at Party headquarters night after night. The policy is integrated with the current line, the tactics are determined by particular circumstances of union affairs.

Party fractions of all branches of the union are aware of the Party's general stand, and it is their job to see that their branch delegates wittingly or unwittingly support this stand. It is less a stand on union affairs than on the political situation; Down with Fascism, For a People's Peace, A Second Front Now, For Peace in Korea, For a United Germany. Communist delegates work out their campaign to a blue-print; they know where to filibuster, where to slip motions through on points of order, where to count on support from Party members on the Executive, where it is tactful to ignore it. The opposition which the Party line resolutions can expect is seriously considered and prepared against. Party-controlled branches throughout the union submit their resolutions to the Party's District Office before putting them down on the union's conference agenda.

All this is not taken lightly. It means hours of late-night discussions, and the good comrades are almost dead-beat before they arrive at the conference. And when they get there not for them the after-hours fun of the average delegate. No strolling the promenade in flannels and open-necked shirts. No little tea parties with their wives. The Communist's work goes around the clock. I have sat in hotel lounges long after non-Party delegates have gone to bed, and I have seen the dawn come before the Party fraction settled its tactical campaign for the following day's meeting.

Sometimes, if things went badly for us during the morning, there would be a hurried Party conference during the lunch hour in some unobtrusive cafe..." "I'd keep a Party stranglehold on a union composed of men who sometimes like to make up their own minds is not easy. It is not done solely by capturing a majority of positions in the offices, by swinging a majority of shop stewards into Party membership. The best way is never give the ordinary man time to make up his own mind. Make it up for him quickly, and shout loud enough to drown the voice of his own free will.

Go down to Dalston bus garage any Friday evening and you'll see what I mean. In the days before the union banned Communists from office you'd find a comrade there behind a table collecting union subscriptions. On the table would be copies of the Daily Worker; copies of Party literature, membership forms. All the time he or somebody else would be shouting: 'Come on mates, how about something for the Party? How about your Daily Worker? How about something for the Daily Worker Fighting Fund, the Anglo-Iron Curtain Friendship Society?'

I can remember him sitting there in the garage on Friday evenings collecting his money, while the Treasurer of the Hackney Communist Party hung about behind his shoulder... When the union business was over the collector would pull out a handful of notes and peel off ten of them - a 'donation from the Dalston busmen towards the vanguard of the people's fight.' When the Hackney Peace Committee wanted to send a delegation to a Peace Festival in Paris we found we hadn't the £50 needed to send them. I went along and told the collector. He pulled out his pack of notes and counted out fifty right there in the Dalston bus garage. It went down on the records of the Peace Committee as 'a loan from the Dalston busmen.' It was never paid back to my knowledge. When the delegation came back I was worried; I could see no way of paying it back. 'So what,' I was told. 'You got a new Party member out of it, didn't

you?' He was right. One of the delegation had returned and joined the Party - and the Panty considered that was worth £50 of the Dalston busmen's money any day..."

The Communist Party could not operate without firm discipline or without penalties which will make that discipline effective. Discipline is as much based on the Party member's fear that a slight error of judgement can easily be construed as betrayal, as it is based on the Party's power to do him serious harm if he offends it." "Communist discipline is not just a simple matter of allegiance to the Party's decisions and loyalty to its policy. It is an inherent feature of a comrade's personal and public life. It is an unquestioning reflex of his behaviour. After a period of time as a Panty member, a month, a year, two years according to the degree of his work, a Communist is expected to become 'self-disciplined'. There's a sad irony in that phrase. One might just as well talk of a ventriloquist's dummy as being self-disciplined. The self-disciplined Communist is one who purges himself of all genuine self-criticism, all honest and refreshing doubt, all tolerance and independence of thought..." "Self-discipline in a Communist means, more often than not, going to the comrade with the wider knowledge of Marxism-Leninism and asking him to put you right But it is as well to make sure that the Marxist expert you go to is not himself in need of self-discipline..." Yet men are men, and the natural instinct of a man in a civilised community like ours is to think for himself and to disagree openly with those whom he believes to be wrong. To deal with this shocking bourgeois muddle-headedness the Party long ago set up disciplinary committees. They may be on a national scale, headed by a national officer like Peter Kerrigan, or they may be committees hastily formed by branch secretariats when faced with a rash of deviationism among branch members. All work in the same way, however, and all have about as much resemblance to a fair trial as my bus has to the Comet. Do not think the accused comrade is allowed either to make a speech in his own defence or call other comrades to support his point of view. Time and time again I've seen Kerrigan hammering on a table with his big fist and shouting 'Don't try to get out of this by making a speech. This isn't a bourgeois court of law. You've no legal rights here, you're a Party comrade before a Party court.'..."

"To the outsider, perhaps, the Communist Party may appear to be a tightly-knit, well drilled body, every man in step. In fact it is continually in danger of the odd comrade here and there putting out his left foot when Central Office demands the right. A little logical thought makes this obvious. Trained not to think for himself, trained to follow the lead of Big Brother, the comrade is vulnerable when left on his own for a moment and under the necessity of acting on his own initiative. When a Panty member is forced to act on his own initiative he is invariably wrong..."

Rarely, however, does the public see the Party out of step. Only twice have I witnessed a public conflict in the Party. This was at two consecutive Party Congresses. In each case delegates from a local branch put forward a resolution expressing disagreement with and mild criticism of the Party's activity during the previous year. At any other political party's conference such criticism might have been answered from the floor, discussed soberly, gone on record or been put to the vote. But in this case the reaction of the Communist Party Congress was a small war in itself. For some minutes other delegates on the floor watched to see which way the cat was going to jump. Then Pollitt, as General Secretary, launched into a violent speech, mercilessly attacking the resolution and its proposers as deviationist, provocationist, opportunist, Trotskyist, any term found in the Party abuse book. You would have thought that the little borough resolution was going to wreck the Party.

Having been given their lead from the Executive other delegates leaped to their feet and excelled each other in attacking the harmless resolution. They were well disciplined. Nobody attempted to answer the criticism raised in the resolution, but all abused the comrades who had moved it. They were only too happy to crawl out of the conference hall with their resolution unanswered..."

"Party discipline also obliges each comrade to buy so many tickets for each new Unity Theatre show. He is not asked how many he would like. He is told how many he will take. The figure of how many he should take is decided after a consideration of the number in his family and the number he should be able to sell among friends. If a Party leader such as Pollitt, Gallacher, Jackson, or Palme Dutt writes a book, borough secretaries are under obligation to order large numbers of them for distribution among Party members, for purchase, and for sale. I once bought ten copies of Willie Gallacher's book. I was able to sell two of them, but I turned in the purchase price often. Of course, if any party member is fool enough to voice a mild protest about this forcible sale of literature, honks and theatre tickets, there is a ready answer for him. 'what are you complaining about? You know what Lenin said? Propaganda is the greatest weapon. Lenin always said something. I can afford to smile now at the East End busman who once looked me straight in the eye without a flicker of a smile and said, 'Blimey, Bob did Lenin have an answer for everything?'...' 'Most women, even Communists' wives, like to do their shopping where they wish. But a Communist's wife gets little opportunity if her husband is well disciplined. And there is always someone to see where your wife does her shopping. This is how the conversation went with me once: 'I saw your wife going into X's shop the other day, Bob. why?' 'To buy something probably.' 'This isn't a funny matter, Comrade Darke. Doesn't she know that man is a Tory? Why doesn't she shop at the Co-op?' 'She probably doesn't want to.' 'It's not a question of what she wants. She's your wife; get her to join the Co-op. We should build up Party strength in the Co-op guilds, you know that. Let's not see it happening again.' My self discipline was good. I accepted the whip. I told Ann. But I wouldn't like to repeat what she said. She didn't have my self-discipline..."

"Perhaps it is not always easy for the Party member to obey the command that he should be arrested as part of a propaganda stunt. Most well disciplined, enthusiastic Communists get arrested at some time or another. I'm lucky; I always escaped it; But the arrests are not accidents; they are part of the Party's policy, they fit neatly into its campaign, and they require absolute obedience on the part of the martyrs, a great deal of 'self-discipline'. when the call up of Z reserve men began the London District Committee decided that six men should chain themselves to the railings in whitehall. The District committee held a meeting to discuss the proposal and to consider six likely candidates. They finally decided on six comrades who were ex-servicemen. These were ordered to report to District Headquarters for a briefing on a special detail. They had no idea what it was all about until they arrived and none of them objected when they were told.

They were told to wear their campaign medals, pick up their chains and set out for Whitehall at the given time. The whole scheme was carried out perfectly. The men were arrested, they shouted their slogans, there was a scuffle with the police and a passing Daily Worker cameraman was lucky enough to get a picture. The full story was published on the Worker, and the Editor did not consider it necessary to point out that all the men were Communists and that the campaign had been worked out in detail in a Communist office. No, it was merely 'Six ex-servicemen demand end of call-up.' The Party members who carry out details like this are always hand-picked and their obedience to Party discipline must be infallible. The party cannot afford the risk that one man may get cold feet at the crucial moment. Generally their training is so good that the whole thing goes through without a hitch. The demonstrator who had his face ground in the dirt of London Airport when he shouted, 'Ridgway, go home!' got his picture in all the papers. The Party got wide publicity for its anti-America campaign, and good discipline paid dividends. Just as it pays dividends when 'a group of working-class women' throw leaflets in the path of a city procession. It pays dividends when the childless Communist carries someone else's baby in a squatters' demonstration. It pays dividends when an agitator in Trafalgar Square is clubbed and dragged



off by the police with his face streaming with blood.

If the victim is thinking of anything at that moment it is of the gratitude the Party will feel for his self-discipline. The comrades who act as front-line men in the Party stunts like this can get nothing more out of it than their own sense of martyrdom. Many of them lose their jobs as a result. A few lucky ones may find a Party shop steward or foreman in their factory who will cover up for them.

But for the rest if they lose their jobs, 'So what, comrade?' they are told. 'Don't you know that you'll always get the sack under capitalism for being a Communist?' If his self-discipline is of a high enough order the Communist will accept the sack as something akin to the Order of Lenin. Self-discipline pays! The party will take a maternal interest even in the dress of those comrades it sees as prestige winners. When I first stood for the local council elections I had my photograph taken for the propaganda sheets and posters. I took a sheet along to the Borough Secretary for approval. I have the average East Ender's liking for colour, and the tie I had been wearing for this photograph was no exception to that taste. The Secretary looked at it and looked at me and then roundly abused me for being photographed in a 'bourgeois tie'. There seemed no point in telling him what he should know, that any working class lad from Hackney puts on a coloured tie when he takes his Sunday morning walk down the Lane. I couldn't see that I was betraying my class by conforming to it. 'Communists standing for election,' I was bluntly told, 'must have no bourgeois contamination. Fancy a comrade like you standing as a representative of our Party wearing spotted tie. Get some more pictures taken this afternoon, this time in a dark tie.'

'I can't go today. I'm working.'

'Take the day off then. You've got to make sacrifices for the Party.'

The damnable feature of this incident was that although I objected, my objection came more from irritation than indignation. I was even half-way toward being convinced that the Borough Secretary was right. Even if I had thought he was totally wrong I would still have done the same thing - gone out and changed the tie.

Not only was my wardrobe under constant surveillance, but my bookshelves too. One day the Literature Secretary of the Hackney Branch called in on business. We talked for a while about this, then suddenly he said: 'Comrade Darke, have you bought a copy of Harry Pollitt's book, *Serving My Time*? 'Yes. It's in the flat, somewhere.' 'Where is it then? Why can't it be seen? Am you ashamed to show it?' He stood up and peered suspiciously at the books. 'Show it to me.'

It would be useless to remember how many times I was mildly or roughly reprimanded for not hanging the pictures of Marxist heroes on my wall. Most comrades were pretty dutiful about this. Marx, Lenin and Stalin looked down on them uncompromisingly while they ate, slept, and cleaned their teeth. All the moral support my walls gave me was the one portrait I have mentioned of Tito. And I took that down eventually..."

"The party was equally indifferent to whatever economic struggle I might have been facing in my personal life. It could be hypercritical of a member who was, to the Party's mind, earning too much money. It was indifferent to his struggles if he was poor. The Party's cynical attitude in this respect was particularly evident after my resignation. I had incurred, on the Party's behalf, debts I had gradually piled up in my party duties. The Party made no effort to honour them. They were paid out of my own pocket, time and time again.

That, perhaps, is understandable. Less understandable is the cost to me of one particular celebration of Harry Pollitt's birthday. The Party decided that dear old Harry should receive some sort of presentation, and that I, as a well-known East End Communist, should make the presentation.

It was proposed that there should be a gathering of selected Party members one Sunday evening, at Lime Grove Baths, Shepherd's Bush and that the presentation should be the

culmination of all the junketing. It was put to me more as an order than a request, but I turned it down. I told the organising committee the truth: I could not afford to take time off from the late shift.

'Don't worry, Comrade,' I was assured, 'the local branch will make up your loss of wages. You'll lose nothing. So I went I lost a day's wages at time and a half, and I walked home to Hackney in thick fog. I didn't hurry the Party but a few weeks later I tactfully suggested that some recompense for my loss of salary would be appreciated. 'what do you think I am' said the secretary of the Hackney Party, 'Father Christmas?' I took it of course, however badly I felt about it. if my conscience became a nuisance, I told it that I had given up a day's wages for the cause..."

"Both the Borough Secretariat of Hackney and the London District Committee could never understand why Ann was not a Party member. They knew that many ordinary comrades found it difficult to recruit their wives, but few Party leaders were married to non-Communist women. It was a paradox to them. It was more, it was a challenge. One day, during an intense new membership drive, Ann came to me and silently showed me an envelope she had received. Inside was a Party card, made out in her name and stamped with two months subscriptions. Together with it was a registration slip on which new members were supposed to list particulars of their age, place of work, union, position in the union and so on. All this had been filled in for Ann, by somebody at Party Headquarters. Ann said nothing to me, she just left the card in my hand. Later in the day my father sent a similar envelope round to me. There was another Party card in it made out in his name. I took them both round to the Secretariat, but they got a blow in first. 'Bob, both your wife and your dad are a couple of months behind in their subs. We've stuck the stamps on, but just let us have the money, will you?'

They didn't get the money, and maybe they didn't like the way I was looking for they didn't press the point. Anyway the cards went in the kitchen fire.

I was shaken by this, shaken more, I think, by Ann's unspoken contempt. And it was while I was in this frame of mind that the Party tried another confidence trick. A young member of the local Literature Secretaries stair arrived at my home with 400 leaflets and 400 letters signed with my name. It was the first time I had seen the letters but the Party had a virtual copyright on the use of my name by then. The letter was an appeal to the tenants of the block of flats in which I lived, asking them to join the Party.

'Let every tenant have one of these, will you, Comrade Darke?' said the young follower of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin, and went on his way cheerfully, confident that he had advanced the revolution by a second or two.

Did I climb the steps of the block and deliver 400 letters signed with my name by someone else?

I did..."

"Not only must a Party member give up his family; he must give up friendship. Party duties make friendship almost impossible anyway. He must be ready and willing to denounce the man who has given him friendship and destroy him if the Party decides. I can speak with feeling about this, for I can never hear a Communist talking about comradeship and loyalty without thinking of Hugh Lister.

I met him when I was working for Lewis Bergers. When I joined this paint factory it was a non-union house, and largely as a result of the organising work I put in there the Party faction inside was able to build up union membership to fifty per cent within a few weeks. For this work I received a TUC diploma and the Tolpuddle Medal, awards which I deeply appreciated.

The Party appreciated them too and shamelessly exploited them. 'Communist wins trade union honour' made good copy for the Daily Worker.

A result of this publicity, however, was a letter from the Reverend Hugh Lister, leader of a mission in the East End. It was a friendly letter, inviting me to have a chat or a cup of tea with him. I put the letter before the Party ('would have been a fool not to). We had heard of him, of course, and his work among the people. 'Go and see him, comrade,' I was told. 'See what he's up to.'

I went to see him, and we drank more tea than was good for either of us-and we talked about the East End. I was surprised by his knowledge and understanding and by his grasp of trade union problems. At last I said to him, a little vaingloriously probably, 'I suppose you know I'm a Communist. How do you feel about that?'

He smiled at me tolerantly, a big man sitting behind the teapot in his priest's uniform. 'Bob, . I know you're a Communist all right. But in our borough there's far too much social injustice, far too many sweat-shops. what about you and I cleaning it up a bit?' Our borough', I thought: This is a little outside his province. what could a parson know about social injustice or sweat-shops? What could he tell a Communist about fighting them?... "I did not give him an answer then. I put his offer before the Party and left it for the vote. For a week or so I lost touch with him, and then I was thrown out of work again.

For six weeks I was 'on the stones', and it was not till toward the end that I got to know that Hugh Lister had been calling at my home once a week to bring a parcel of food and a toy for my family.

The Party told me: 'Watch him, comrade. Use him, but don't let him get the leadership of . the workers in the borough. That's our role.' That was the beginning of a friendship which I betrayed and which he honoured. I asked him first if he would speak on a trade union platform, and any early doubts I may have had about him were dispelled when his fire and sincerity had a tremendous effect on his audience. Between us we worked out a campaign for organising some of the non-union factories in the borough. I know why he was doing it. He believed it was his Christian duty to raise the standard of work and living for the people of his parish. And he probably knew why I was doing it too: to raise the membership and influence of the Communist Party. He was a superb tactician. He could have sat in his mission mouthing comfortable platitudes, but he preferred to come out on the kerb and fight for what he believed. We went from factory to factory. We worked until the early hours of every morning. One night it would be at his mission, another at my home. We prepared propaganda sheets, we briefed speakers, we organised help for strikers and for the unemployed. We had two factories on strike at one time, and the way he worked among the strikers was enough to make the oldest union member envious...

"I went along to a Party branch meeting one day. I announced that the Lister-Darke campaign had recruited 3,000 new trade unionists. I reported that there was a move to make Lister honorary chairman of a union branch, and I think I wanted the Party to support him. 'How many Communist recruits did he get?' I was asked. 'How many Daily Workers did he sell?' And then: 'Don't get the wrong idea, comrade. Encourage Lister to boost up union membership if you like, but don't expect us to lift him into union office.' The Party decided to capture the chairmanship itself and agreed to oppose Lister with a man . whose influence they believed to be just as strong. Myself. I accepted the nomination (I had no choice, it was a Party order) with some misgivings. But Lister seemed so genuinely pleased that I soon lost my feeling of shame. Of course I did not defeat him; he won the position without much difficulty. That was the signal for the Party to go into action. At that moment my health broke down. The union doctor advised me to give up all activity and rest. Rest to an East Ender in those days meant financial hardship, and I didn't escape it I lay on by back ill while the Party's attack on Lister as a 'careerist' and 'capitalist adventurer', as a 'bourgeois dilettante' and 'middle class reformist', got into full swing. He knew what my Party was doing, but it did not alter his feelings for me. while I lay ill he called regularly with parcels of food' with

financial help, with toys. He offered to send Ann and our daughter to his mother's home in Cheshire for a holiday, and he was genuinely disappointed when she refused. Eventually he was stung by the Party's vicious whispering campaign, by its high-pressure tactics at union meetings, and he began to strike back.

He began to attack the Party on the platform. Of course that made it easy for the Party to bring its attack into the open. They twisted his attacks on the Party into 'attacks on the working class', they held up his words to prove that he was 'anti-Semitic' and 'Fascist'. They accused him of being in truck with the employers. They declared he was ready to sell out the union. They kept up the sustained attack for so long that the poison began to work. What was I doing? I was keeping my mouth shut because I was under Party discipline. I sat through meeting after meeting while comrades abused Hugh Lister, and I said nothing in his defence. He was my friend. He had been a friend to my family. But I was tough. I was a Bolshevik. Private emotions came second to Party loyalty in the revolutionary struggle. Or maybe I was a moral coward; it seems a saner explanation.

Before the climax the Party's slander campaign became more vicious.

He's meeting the bosses without the union's permission ... He's not to be trusted, he's a member of the boss class himself He'll sell out to them when the pinch comes ... Look at the way he ..... Look at the way he lives... You wouldn't say he was one of us, would you?

It was successful of course. The ordinary rank and file unionists, bewildered by a confusion of loyalties, began to stay away from union meetings. Lister's strength weakened, the Party's grew.

He knew what was happening. He wrote to me one day. He did not attack me for what my Party was doing. He merely expressed his anxiety for our friendship and hoped that we would keep it alive whatever happened.

I never replied to his letter..."

"During the serious housing shortage of the mid-forties the Party worked the most sensational confidence trick in its history - the Squatters' Movement. So pathetic were the hardship cases exploited in this deception that for a while even Fleet Street was convinced that it was normal, a spontaneous demonstration on the part of the homeless. But when the almost military-like precision of the campaign became obvious there should have been no doubt in anybody's mind that the Party was at the back of it.

The Party never openly admitted that it ran the squatting in the West End blocks of flats, or the rash of small house squatting that spread across London. The Daily Worker covered the campaign with the same poker-face inscrutability it wears when Party members paint anti-American slogans on cars in Grosvenor Square or demonstrate against American bomber stations. If you only read the Daily Worker it always sounds as if the party has been taken as much by surprise as everybody else. The London Squatter Movement was conducted by Ted Bramley, from the offices of the London District Committee. Bramley actually appeared in person to run the taking-over of blocks of flats in Kensington, and members of his staff occupied rooms in one of the blocks to conduct the campaign more efficiently. In Hackney the Party was instructed to ear-mark vacant houses, to collect homeless families (there were names enough on my lists) and move them in on the word go. Of course Councillor C. H. Darke was on his feet in the Council Chamber soon enough to support the people's action and to call for resolute and sympathetic action from the Chamber.

Let it be understood that I was as angry as anybody else to see these flats vacant at a time when the housing situation was so desperate. And for a time I believed the Party had found the right solution to the problem, arbitrary seizing of property. But I soon realised that the Party's real attitude was no less cynical than usual. It regarded the various 'Squatters' Committees' we had formed as no more than propaganda vehicles. The Party's leaders knew that the authorities would not allow the situation to develop and would suppress it forcibly. It

knew, in short, that the squatters' campaign would be defeated. But win or lose the Party was going to benefit on two scores:

1. It would get the kudos for making the only forthright effort to grapple with the housing shortage and the anomalies that existed. 2. It could use the opposition to the Squatters' Movement as proof that the Government was refusing to live up to its Socialism. Conclusion? 'Only the Communist Party fights for the workers!'

And that was how it worked out. Heaven only knows how many wretched pram-pushing families were moved into flats and rooms found for them by our eager-beaver comrades, only to be moved out again by the police. The siege of the West End flats, the blockade running of food and water by Communist flying squads, got full play in the Party press with full use of epithets like 'fascist technique', 'Labour's Tory tactics'.

For weeks after the defeat of the Squatters' Movement the Party in Hackney was capitalising on the misery of the debacle. Homeless families, coming back to the now defunct Party Squatters' Committee, were told 'Go and see Councillor Bob Darke. He'll raise your case in the Council. And don't forget, the Communist Party has been the only political party to help you....

"The Hackney Communist Party took all its irons out of the fire for its Peace Campaign. As Trade Council Secretary I received letter after letter from 'an ordinary trade unionist' appealing to the Council to fight for peace. I read the letters out at Council meetings of course. You could always tell when they came from a Party member; they were signed 'Yours fraternally'. I was constantly badgered by Betteridge, the Borough Secretary of the Party, to admit 'non-party peace deputations' to the Borough Council. When the deputations arrived the non-party leaders always greeted me cheerily with 'Hello, comrade!' And then the Peace petition was inaugurated and the whole campaign became vintage Bamum and Bailey, complete with clowns, wild animals, and fearless maidens shot from cannons.

Carefully worded to confuse the issue, broad enough in outline to include both Party line and the Ten Commandments, the petition forms flooded off the press into the home of every Communist. I received a quota of 2,000. As a Borough Councillor, I was told, my circle should be wide, and 2,000 signatures were hardly enough. What of the cycling club you helped? What of the Th patients? What of the housing cases? What of your wife's friends? What of the parents of your children's friends? In the early days of the Petition it was easy enough to obtain signatures, but later on, as the non-Communist press began to hit at it, things became less easy. It was then, I think, that the rank-and-File Communist began to forge signatures.

The Party claimed 27,000 signatures to the Petition from Hackney alone. I do not believe it. My most generous estimate would put the genuine number at a third of that figure. Certainly my own name was never on the Petition. So hysterical was the campaign that the Party never checked to see whether the Communists themselves signed it. No Peace Petition carries the name of Bob Darke. If it does it is a forgery.

I do not make this charge of forgery lightly, for I have experienced it on other occasions. The Daily Worker once published the terms of a message to Vishinsky congratulating him on his struggle for peace before the United Nations. It was signed, said the Worker, 'by five leading Hackney Trade Unionists.' Among them was my name.

I never saw that message nor had I signed it..."

"Wherever a Communist Party exists it never sleeps. It is able and ready to take advantage of the slightest weakness on the part of any non-Communist, be he Socialist or Tory. It is a Party constantly at war. Its members are the victims of a war-neurosis, a war-fever and a war-hysteria. Where a Communist Party gives ground it retreats not through moderation but through guile. It is not invincible but it is controllable. Where its influence and power have been achieved as a result of the gullibility or apathy of those who oppose it, there can we seek

a remedy. By those who oppose it I do not mean the reactionary organisations of capitalism. I mean the ordinary working man, the Socialist trade unionist who must surely be sickened by the spectacle of his union corrupted by the political opportunism of Communism.

If that ordinary trade unionist is honest he must accept some blame for the spectacle.

wherever the Communist Party of Great Britain has obtained domination of a trade union it has done so by exploiting the apathy of the ordinary rank and file. wherever it has lost that power, as it has done in some unions during the past two years, it has been because the rank and file has at last stood up and fought back, has attended meetings, has recognised and rejected the stacked votes and the stacked resolutions of the Party fractions.

The non-Communist trade unionist must recognise that the Communist Party, however successful it seems to be on his own behalf, is none the less ready enough to abandon him tomorrow. The Party's fight is only his fight when it fits the general pattern of world Communist domination.

He must realise that his fellow trade unionist who is an avowed Communist has a cynical regard for the integrity of the union, that his ultimate allegiance is not to the Trade Union Congress, but to the World Federation of Trade Unions and to the Cominform that dominates it... The Communist Party can only be fought in the unions. Bans and witch-hunts are of small value. The Communist Party, long experienced in turning victimisation into political propaganda, is hit hardest when the workers vote against it.

I have not written this book because I wish to raise the pile of ex-Communist literature by another inch or two. I have written it in an attempt to get home to my fellow trade unionists the extent to which their interests and their rights are being shamelessly betrayed by the Communist Party."

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